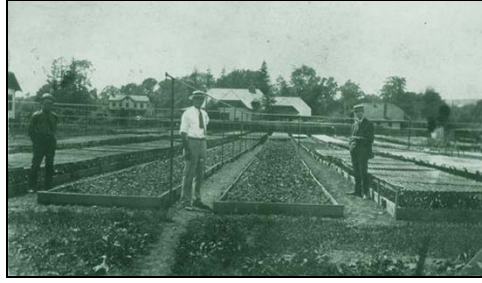


PRINCETON NURSERIES KINGSTON SITE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT



CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION, WORK SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION TO PRINCETON NURSERIES

Princeton Nurseries was established in Kingston, New Jersey in 1913 as a branch of F & F Nurseries, based in Springfield, New Jersey. Throughout its nearly 100-year history, the Flemer family was the keystone of the business. William Flemer Sr. founded F & F Nurseries in 1882, later putting his son William Flemer Jr. in charge of the Kingston Site.¹ Flemer Jr. organized the business, including the personnel departments and the physical layout of the 1,500 acres of farmlands.² In 1920, Flemer Jr. and his brother Carl purchased the family business from their father. By 1930, both the Kingston Site and original Springfield Site were prospering and the brothers decided to divide the business into two distinct nurseries; Flemer Jr. took ownership of the Kingston Site using the name Princeton Nurseries.³ Under his direction, Princeton Nurseries established itself as a prominent supplier of the highest quality nursery stock. Flemer Jr. strove to maintain a commitment to excellence and innovation that would eventually make Princeton Nurseries one of the most renowned commercial nursery operations in the country.⁴

Eventually William Flemer Jr. passed control of Princeton Nurseries to his sons, William Flemer III and John W. Flemer. William Flemer III oversaw plant production and new cultivar development while John Flemer administered the business, and both men made important strides and contributions to the nursery industry. Flemer III introduced dozens of new plant varieties during his tenure at the Kingston Site⁵; John researched and published on issues related to business administration and labor management.⁶ Under their direction, Princeton Nurseries reached the height of its success, and the Kingston Site reached the height of its development.

By the 1930s, the nursery grounds consisted of open farm fields and small clusters of farmhouses and outbuildings. The Flemers retained the farm buildings, using them for worker housing and to support nursery operations. Consequently, this helped the commercial nursery land maintain a rural, agricultural character. As new facilities were added, they were designed in a relatively simplistic style, complementing the overall character of the landscape. In 1960, the Flemers sold several hundred acres of their land in the Princeton area and, in 1962, began purchasing available land in Allentown, New Jersey, creating a secondary site for Princeton Nurseries.⁷

In 1951, Princeton University acquired the land and buildings of the Rockefeller Medical research Institute, “which since 1915 had occupied a large campus straddling Route 1.”⁸ Much of the portion of the land west of Route 1 was used by Princeton Nurseries; subsequently, much of the land has

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become the site of the Princeton Landing residential development and, along Route 1, office/research buildings. In 1973, Princeton University announced its “long-range plan to influence the quality of development in the area surrounding the Forrestal Campus.” The project, planned by Princeton Forrestal Associates, would be called Princeton Forrestal Center. Later, St Joseph’s Seminary, founded in 1914, sold 108 acres of its land, much of which had been used by Princeton Nurseries, to the University; this area was subsequently developed as a retail area with a hotel (Princeton Forrestal Village) and as a “full-service retirement community” (Windrows at Princeton Forrestal and the Pavilion at Forrestal).

Following the death of John W. Flemer in 1982, nearly all the remaining lands in Kingston were eventually sold to Princeton Forrestal Associates, a for-profit division of Princeton University formed as a way to “influence the shape and pattern of development in central New Jersey.”⁹ As the nursery lands were sold, portions of the former production fields were developed. In 1988, Princeton University’s initial plans for the development of the former Princeton Nursery property were withdrawn following considerable opposition from environmental and open space groups and, in particular, the restrictions of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission’s “A” Zone (1000 feet from the centerline of the canal.) The University then announced that it would not develop the area between Mapleton Road and the canal.¹⁰ After the death of John W. Flemer, the business also gradually declined and more and more operations were shifted from Kingston to Allentown.¹¹ In 1995, the Kingston Site was closed.

As plans for development of the former nursery lands evolved and the character of their formerly rural context shifted, a growing concern arose for the future of the historic Princeton Nurseries landscape. In response, a group of interested residents formed the Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands in 2000. The Friends group began exploring options and building support to preserve as much of the former nursery as possible.¹² Urged by Friends of Princeton Nurseries Lands and others, negotiations based upon changes in zoning began between the representatives of Princeton University, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Green Acres Program, and South Brunswick Township. William Flemer’s Sons, Inc., which had retained 63 acres of the core area, was brought into the negotiations. Negotiations for the future development rights continued for several years, and eventually Princeton University agreed to donate 127 acres of land to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and Township of South Brunswick.¹³ The Township revised its zoning to enlarge the area which Princeton University could develop for office use and approved the University’s General Development Plan. Most of the land that had been retained by William Flemer’s Sons was acquired through the Green Acres Program with assistance from the Township; this land encompassed the former nursery core, including the office, blacksmith shop, operations core, and former worker dormitory area. A total of 52.463 acres of this core area is now known as Mapleton Preserve. Mapleton Preserve and 7.207 acres, as well as several adjacent parcels, are being retained as open space available for public enjoyment and passive recreation.¹⁴ Additional land with houses (some owned by the University and some by William Flemer’s Sons) was left to be sold for private development, but with historic preservation easements granted to DEP. While not all of the original 1,500 acres and structures could be preserved, the Mapleton Preserve and the adjacent preserved areas continue to convey the former character of the historic Princeton Nurseries.

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Princeton Nurseries is a valuable part of the history and growth of the commercial nursery trade and the physical development of Kingston. Today, the former nursery lands have been divided, encompassing residential subdivisions, commercial zones, private residences, and public open space including the Mapleton Preserve. The Preserve and outlying open space offer numerous natural resources and recreational opportunities. The character and history of the Princeton Nurseries landscape also has strong interpretive opportunities, providing a unique glimpse into the growth of the nursery industry and the innovations made by the Flemer family.

B. KINGSTON SITE BOUNDARY & CONTEXT

The Princeton Nurseries Kingston Site is located in central New Jersey. Historically the Princeton Nurseries Kingston Site encompassed approximately 1,500 acres at its height.¹⁵ The expansive nursery grounds encompassed areas of South Brunswick, Plainsboro, West Windsor, and Franklin Townships.¹⁶ The lands stretched between Lake Carnegie on the west and beyond US Route 1 on the east. The scope of this report addresses nearly 530 acres of the former nursery lands that remain undeveloped in the Townships of South Brunswick and Plainsboro; the nearly 530 acres lies generally in the area bounded by the D&R Canal on the west, Route 1 on the west, Seminary Drive on the south and Ridge Road on the north. An additional core area of about 50 acres has been identified for detailed focus. This acreage comprises the lands that have been designated as Mapleton Preserve. While a core area has been identified to help focus documentation efforts, the character and evolution of the entire nursery landscape (including lands both owned and leased) will be discussed, giving context to the site as an element within a broader landscape. (See Figure I.1.)

When Princeton Nurseries was established in 1913, Kingston was primarily undeveloped with farms and agricultural fields defining the landscape character. Over time, the farms were purchased, some for nursery operations and others to make room for suburban development. In addition to Princeton Nurseries, various public and cultural resources were established. These include St. Joseph's Seminary and the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. The property of the Rockefeller Institute was acquired by Princeton University in 1951 and became the Princeton University Forrestal Campus.¹⁷ In 1973, the campus was developed as the nucleus of the Princeton Forrestal Center.¹⁸ The establishment of the Cook Natural in 1970 and the D&R Canal State Park in 1974 added to public open space and paths and helped preserved part of the area's historic character. Also important was the relationship to the unincorporated village of Kingston. Today, the overall character of the formerly agricultural Princeton Nurseries landscape has shifted, with a considerable amount of development constructed in recent years. As the surrounding context continues to be altered, Mapleton Preserve and adjacent preserved areas remain as a testament to the historic character and value of Princeton Nurseries.

C. CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Heritage Landscapes completed this Princeton Nurseries Kingston Site Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for the Township of South Brunswick, New Jersey, supported by funds from the New Jersey Historic Trust. The Scope of Work for the CLR identifies the intent of this project to provide

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thorough historical documentation, gain an understanding of its cultural significance, and develop a sound approach to both the preservation stewardship and treatment of the landscape into the future. As federally defined, a CLR is a broad planning document that will form the basis for actions directed to preserve and interpret the significant cultural landscape. The planning effort undertaken for this landscape seeks an appropriate balance of historic integrity, public and visitor uses, functionality, and maintainability to frame a vision for the future of the landscape that is harmonious with its past.

The scope further specifies that the report process includes historical documentation research, field documentation, existing conditions mapping, exploration of current landscape uses and maintenance, and analysis of continuity, change, and historic integrity of the landscape. The discussion of landscape analysis helps to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between the historic and existing character of the Princeton Nurseries cultural landscape. From this multi-level foundation, strategies for landscape preservation treatment and management are presented that respect historic character and unique identity, address current issues and needs, and envision a dynamic future for the landscape that is both site-specific and sensitive to the Kingston Site within a broader community context. A logical approach for implementation priorities and phasing is provided as well as a landscape management outline and estimate of annual staffing and skills needed to adequately steward the historic landscape.

A variety of relevant materials including personal collections, newspaper articles, published and unpublished documents, photographs, aerial photographs, plans, and maps provided evidence of physical conditions, property character, and land uses over time. Study of these materials revealed the early character and continued evolution of Princeton Nurseries, constituting the basis for the landscape history. The landscape history assembles all available sources, but remains somewhat incomplete due to gaps in documentation. Historic period plans and images present details of the evolving landscape character, serving as references for the landscape history.

Heritage Landscapes performed reconnaissance of the existing physical conditions at Princeton Nurseries, focusing efforts within Mapleton Preserve but also considering adjacent areas and landscape context. During field sessions, remnant historic features, dominant woodland vegetation species, and existing landscape elements were documented. From the fieldwork, recent aerial photographs, and available mapping and existing conditions plan was created that graphically presents the character of the former nursery landscape.

Cultural landscapes can be subdivided into character-defining features. Federal guidance including the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, refers to and defines the character-defining features of a landscape.¹⁹ Character-defining features are identified and enumerated in the CLR as a series of interrelated, specific aspects of the cultural landscape. They include:

- *Spatial Organization, Land Patterns, & Land Use & Visual Relationships* – These features address the three-dimensional organization and patterns of spaces in the landscape, land uses, and visual relationships, as shaped by both cultural and natural features; the uses of the land and the views and visual relationships that organize the landscape as defined by topography,

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vegetation, circulation, built elements; and often a combination of these character-defining features to create the overall patterns of the landscape. At Princeton Nurseries, the organization of the open agricultural fields, planted rows, linear windrows, and clusters of extant structures and vegetation are dominant features that define spatial and visual relationships.

- *Topography & Natural Systems* – Topography is the shape of the ground plane and its height or depth. Topography occurs in relation to natural systems and as a result of human manipulation. Natural systems include landforms, watershed systems, climate, surface and underground flows, and their effects. The topography of the Princeton Nurseries landscape is relatively level with subtle changes in elevation.
- *Vegetation* – Vegetation can include groups of plants, individual plants, agricultural fields, planting beds, formal or informal tree groves, woodland, meadow, or turf. Vegetation at Princeton Nurseries includes extant plantings laid out during the nursery operations. Notably, a number of impressive evergreen windrows remain as well as some extant stock plants. A considerable amount of volunteer vegetation has grown in both wooded and open areas. Open areas with mown turf can be found throughout the site. More recently, the Flemer Arboretum has been created adjacent to the entry to Mapleton Preserve.
- *Circulation* – Circulation features may include roads, drives, trails, paths, and parking areas individually sited or linked to form a network or system. Alignment, width, surface and edge treatment, and materials contribute to the character of circulation features. Both vehicular and pedestrian circulation is accommodated at Princeton Nurseries along roads that once provided important access to the fields of plant stock. Many of these roads are either compacted dirt or turf.
- *Hydrology & Water Features* – Features of water systems may be aesthetic as well as functional components of the landscape. Water features may include fountains, pools, cascades, irrigation systems, streams, ponds, lakes, and aqueducts. Prominent water features present in the Princeton Nurseries landscape include remnant irrigation system elements and Heathcote Brook. In addition, an unnamed tributary runs northwest from south of the Plainsboro - South Brunswick boundary. Lake Carnegie and the Delaware and Raritan Canal are located to the west of the former nursery lands.
- *Structures, Site Furnishings & Objects* – Numerous structures are found throughout Princeton Nurseries, including the former office building, blacksmith shop, greenhouses and former worker houses. In addition, landscape structures, non-habitable constructed elements such as pavilions or features such as walls, bridges, arbors, terraces, steps, and fences are also found. Site furnishings such as signage and light fixtures are generally considered small-scale elements in the landscape while items such as garbage cans and benches are considered landscape objects. The Princeton Nurseries landscape incorporates a number of site furnishings and objects, including signs, former plant protection guards, and lights.

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These landscape character-defining features are used in the report to focus on the definition and details of the Princeton Nurseries cultural landscape as it evolved through time to the present. The same vocabulary is used throughout the landscape analysis and preservation treatment approach.

Heritage Landscapes approached the Princeton Nurseries Mapleton Preserve CLR in accordance with federal guidance for cultural landscape preservation. Relevant professional guidance includes the following: *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, *National Park Service Cultural Resource Management Guideline 28*, *National Register Bulletin 18: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes*, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, *NPS Preservation Brief 36 Protecting Cultural Landscapes*, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and *National Park Service Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management*.

The Princeton Nurseries Mapleton Preserve CLR is organized into five chapters. Chapter I: Introduction, Work Scope & Methodology offers an introduction to the project scope and implemented methodology. Chapter II: Landscape History details the history and evolution of the landscape from its origins in the early 20th century through the end of the historic period in the 1980s. The years following the historic period and existing landscape are presented in Chapter III: Recent History & Existing Landscape. Chapter IV: Landscape Context & Analysis compares findings from the site history and existing conditions to analyze continuity and change through time. Chapter IV also includes a discussion of the landscape integrity of Princeton Nurseries following National Register of Historic Places guidance. Recommendations and strategies to guide the future of the Princeton Nurseries Mapleton Preserve are presented in Chapter V: Cultural Landscape Preservation Treatment. Appendix A provides reference materials for the CLR.

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CHAPTER I ENDNOTES

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- ⁸ J.J. Merritt, *Princeton's James Forrestal Campus: Fifty Years of Sponsored Research*, Princeton, Princeton University, 2002, p. 29.
- ⁹ "Princeton Nurseries Wholesale Catalog," Princeton, NJ: Princeton Nurseries, Fall 1995 / Spring 1996: vii; "University clarified its land development motives", *Princeton Packet*, (18 Dec 1987): 18A.; "PU, developer strike accord", *Princeton Packet*, (1 May 1990): 1A; Princeton Forrestal Center, "About Us," <http://www.princetonforrestalcenter.com/about-us.html>.
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- ¹¹ "Princeton Nurseries Wholesale Catalog," Princeton, NJ: Princeton Nurseries, Fall 1995 / Spring 1996: vii.
- ¹² Karen Linder to William Flemer IV, May 2006, Private Collection of William Flemer IV.
- ¹³ New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, "Green Acres Success Stories, Delaware and Raritan Canal Preservation Advances" <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres/feature.htm>.
- ¹⁴ Karen Linder to William Flemer IV, May 2006, Private Collection of William Flemer IV.
- ¹⁵ The figure of 1,500 acres has not been definitively verified, but historic documentation suggests that this figure is accurate.
- ¹⁶ Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands, "History of Princeton Nurseries," <http://www.fpnll.org/history.html>.
- ¹⁷ J.J. Merritt, *Princeton's James Forrestal Campus: Fifty Years of Sponsored Research*, Princeton, Princeton University, 2002, p. 29 -32.
- ¹⁸ Forrestal Campus, (from Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, Princeton University Press, 1978) as noted on http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/forrestal_campus.html.
- ¹⁹ Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, NPS, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 1998.

